

VZCZCXRO3395
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0598 0671118
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081118Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2045
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000598

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETTC](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: BA'ATHISTS READY TO RECONCILE,
CLAIMS SHEIKH OF SADDAM'S TRIBE

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John G. Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din cable.

12. (C) SUMMARY: The top sheikh of Saddam Hussein's tribe, along with other local figures from his home village in Salah Ad Din (SAD) province, recently asked the PRT to convey to the USG that Ba'athists in SAD seek direct dialogue and reconciliation with the USG. They also seek help unfreezing the assets of some 1,480 local Ba'athists in the province. While reconciliation would properly be addressed by the Government of Iraq (GOI), the timing of the request (coming soon after the recent provincial elections) suggests that leading Sunni Arabs believe that political engagement in a democratic context will be to their advantage. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) Sheikh Hassan Nida (leader of the Albu Nasser tribe, to which Saddam belonged), accompanied by Sheikh Ahmed Fahad al Haza', the chairman of the unofficial local council of Owja (where Saddam is buried), met with the PRT's Tikrit Satellite representative February 24 and asked that the PRT convey several points to U.S. leaders.

SHEIKH HASSAN'S POINTS

14. (C) The SAD Ba'athists want reconciliation with the USG. They believe this would ensure Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other violent extremists are run out of the country, would help bring back up to 500,000 highly competent administrators and former military officers now living in Syria due to fears of persecution, and would allow several "true sheikhs" living outside Iraq to return. Owja Council Member Hossam Mahmud, who joined the conversation at the end, echoed this sentiment, saying "write this down... we Ba'athists want direct communication with the U.S. government in order to seek reconciliation." Sheikh Hassan promised to provide a list of the "true sheikhs" mentioned above within two weeks.

15. (C) In addition, Sheikh Hassan wants the Government of Iraq (GOI) to release the assets of 1,480 Ba'athists residing in Owja, which had been frozen as part of the GOI's DeBa'athification policy. Sheikh Hassan said he had submitted this request to the GOI, but had received no response. He blamed President Talabani for the freeze. Finally, Sheikh Hassan and Mr. Hossam want Army and Police colleges to be established in SaD. They believe that these colleges, in conjunction with the return to duty of former-regime officers, would benefit national security.

16. (C) EMBASSY BAGHDAD COMMENT: Sunni Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Rafi Al Issawi recently told poloff that he had received a delegation of members from Saddam's tribe requesting his assistance to dismiss a number of penalties imposed on the tribe by the GOI's DeBa'athification process. Specifically, the tribal representatives had requested the lifting of prohibitions on the sale of tribal property, which they alleged had been imposed by these statutes. Issawi

indicated he would seek to be helpful in at least excluding from such provisions those members of the tribe not involved in crimes during the Saddam era. END COMMENT.

OTHER CONCERNS

¶7. (C) Sheikh Ahmed added a concern that Iranian influence on the government is a major cause of insecurity in the area and that AQI, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Peshmerga forces, and Badr militias were destabilizing elements in SAD. Sheikh Hassan also declared that the GOI's DeBa'athification policy was destabilizing Iraq.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The GOI is the right one to address Sheikh Hassan's Q8. (C) The GOI is the right one to address Sheikh Hassan's requests. The PRT finds it credible that he would speak on behalf of many prominent Iraqi Ba'athists. The timing of SAD Ba'athists' overture regarding reconciliation should be viewed in the context of the successful provincial elections: we believe that the elections have helped to show Sheikh Hassan and others that the democratic process legitimately offers Sunni Arabs a voice in government. We will continue to monitor Ba'athist activity in SAD, and see whether it might be appropriate for the USG to assist in Ba'athist reconciliation with the GOI. END COMMENT.
BUTENIS